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# CHINA'S QUEST FOR SECURITY IN THE POST-COLD WAR WORLD

Samuel S. Kim

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**CHINA'S QUEST FOR SECURITY  
IN THE POST-COLD WAR WORLD**

**Samuel S. Kim**

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## FOREWORD

In April 1996, the Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute held its Seventh Annual Strategy Conference. This year's theme was, "China Into the 21st Century: Strategic Partner and . . . or Peer Competitor."

Dr. Samuel S. Kim of Columbia University argues in this monograph that, while post-Tiananmen China is a growing regional military power, it is, almost paradoxically, a weak state both pretending and trying to be a strong one. By flexing its muscles with its weaker neighbors, China is largely compensating for self-doubts about its national image and strength.

What the world sees in China, a modernizing, economically robust, and assertive regional hegemon and world power "want-to-be," is, Dr. Kim asserts, at least in part a facade. Although China has made remarkable economic progress in the past few years, those who trumpet its rise do not consider its massive internal contradictions involving social, political, demographic, and environmental problems. Dr. Kim makes the point that weaknesses in those areas cannot be overcome by purchasing modern weapons, even those high-tech weapons that bolster a nation's claim to being a major military power.

The United States is, and in all likelihood will remain, a Pacific power. China, despite the limitations Dr. Kim examines herein, will be an immense factor in the strategic balance of power in the Pacific region. For that reason, I commend this monograph to you.



RICHARD H. WITHERSPOON  
Colonel, U.S. Army  
Director, Strategic Studies Institute

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR**

SAMUEL S. KIM is a senior research scholar at the East Asian Institute of Columbia University. He was formerly a professor at Princeton University. Dr. Kim has written widely on Chinese foreign policy, East Asian international relations, and world order. He is the author of many books, most recently, *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, published in 1994.

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## **CHINA'S QUEST FOR SECURITY IN THE POST-COLD WAR WORLD**

### **INTRODUCTION**

China's security behavior, riddled with contradictions and paradoxes, seemed made to order for challenging scholars and policymakers concerned about the shape of things to come in post-Cold War international life. With the progressive removal of the Soviet threat from China's expansive security parameters from Southeast Asia, through South Asia and Central Asia, to Northeast Asia, coupled with the growing engagement in international economic and security institutions, came perhaps the most benign external strategic environment and the greatest international interdependence that China has ever enjoyed in its checkered international relations. Despite the deterioration of Sino-American relations in the past 2 years, most Chinese strategic analysts do not believe the United States poses a clear and present military threat. Indeed, there has been no shortage of upbeat assessments of China's post-Cold War security environment to be, on balance, the least threatening since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949.<sup>1</sup> And yet Beijing has been acting in recent years in a highly provocative manner as if it were faced with the greatest threat. For good or otherwise, Beijing managed to capture global prime time with the "rise of China" chorus in the global marketplace suddenly turning into the "rise of China threat" debate in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. All the same, Beijing seemed determined enough to proceed with all deliberate speed to beef up its military power projection capabilities, especially air and blue-water naval power, with the real military spending increasing at double-digit rates even as global military spending, especially those of all the other members of the Perm Five in the United Nations (U.N.) Security Council, began to fall sharply since 1992.<sup>2</sup> The revealing paradox of the capitalist

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world economy is that “market Leninist China,” with the fastest growing economy—China’s GDP in 1994 reached almost \$3 trillion on a purchasing power parity (PPP) basis, making it the second-largest economy in the world after the United States<sup>3</sup>—is, at the same time, the fastest-growing emitter of greenhouse gases and the largest recipient of multilateral aid from the World Bank and of bilateral aid from Japan!

What matters most is not so much the growth of Chinese capability as how Beijing uses its new military strength. Through a series of provocative actions, China has cast a long shadow over the strategic landscape of the Asia-Pacific region. The demonstration of China’s military muscle as an up-and-coming naval power is all the more unsettling, as the Asia-Pacific region is a primarily maritime theater with several major flash points. In recent years Beijing expanded its dominion in the geo-strategically vital and geo-economically contested South China Sea, test-launched its first mobile intercontinental ballistic missile, and continued to defy the post-Cold War moratorium on nuclear testing. China’s southward creeping expansionism from the Paracels to the Spratlys to Mischief Reef is a stark reminder of Beijing’s growing naval power—and its willingness to use it if necessary—in a resource-rich area of more than 3.6 million square kilometers. Only China, among the five recognized nuclear powers (with the short-lived exception of France), defied the post-Cold War moratorium on nuclear testing that has been in place since October 1992. Then came a series of missile-firing military exercises toward various target areas near Taiwan in July and August 1995. The latest third round of saber-rattling missile diplomacy started March 19, 1996, following 9 days of live-ammunition air and naval maneuvers and ballistic missile testings to stop Taiwan’s accelerated march toward democracy only to help people on Island China to forge a more distinct Taiwanese identity. As well, this latest (mis)guided missile embargo caused ripples throughout the region and beyond.

## **SECURITY, LEGITIMACY AND IDENTITY**

What, then, accounts for the puzzle of an ascent post-Tiananmen China and its post-Cold War international demarche in the seemingly benign external security environment? This is not an easy question to answer, but one thing seems relatively certain. With the clarity and simplicity of East-West conflict gone and the collapse of Marxist-Leninist ideology as the legitimizing prop, Beijing is seemingly unsure of its place in a world no longer dominated by superpower rivalry, and the communist regime is in the grip of an unprecedented legitimization-cum-identify crisis. Not since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 have the questions of internal and external legitimacy—catalyzed by the Tiananmen carnage and the collapse of global communism—been as conflated as in the early post-Cold War years. As a result, the Chinese leadership is compelled to shift from charismatic and ideological legitimization to performance-based legitimization (economic growth). As well, the regime has turned with greater urgency to hypernationalism based on a new amalgam of ethnonational appeals to the ancient, glorious Confucian past and the greatness of Chinese civilization and people. Such national identity enactment may be seen as a necessary compensatory-searching behavior, a function of a regime with weak legitimacy trying hard to bring about national reunification and restore what Chinese of every ideological coloration believe to be their natural and inalienable right to great power status. Herein lies the logic of China exceptionalism, seeking China-specific exemption in the international human rights regime and China-specific entitlement in international security and economic institutions, all in the service of restoring China's great-power status. Nonetheless, the decay of the legitimizing prop of socialism and the rise of Han chauvinism can be expected to have far-reaching impacts on Beijing's quest for security as well as on the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

## CHINA'S CONCEPT OF SECURITY

The traditional Chinese concept of security is captured in an old Chinese aphorism—“The country that has no enemy in mind will perish.” Likewise, the opening lines of volume one of *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* read: “Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution. The basic reason why all previous revolutionary struggles in China achieved so little was their failure to unite with real friends in order to attack real enemies.”<sup>4</sup> Security in traditional (pre-modern) China, Johnston concludes in his well-documented study of Imperial China’s strategic culture and grand military strategy, was a “product of superior military preparations, the application of violence, and the destruction of the adversary.”<sup>5</sup> The historical experience of Western and Japanese imperialism during the century of national humiliation (1839-1945) seems to have endowed the Chinese with the 19th century conception of absolute state sovereignty and taught the lesson of the importance of power politics in international relations and its corollary—that China could not be respected without power. The same experiential logic of the Korean War seemed to be on Mao’s mind when he said in 1956: “If we are not to be bullied in the present-day world, we cannot do without the [atomic] bomb.”<sup>6</sup> In short, China’s concept of security at a given point in time can be seen as made manifest in the concept of power, the definition of the external security environment (including the identification of the enemy), and the evolution of military doctrines.

Despite the quantitative explosion of IR literature in the post-Mao era, a corollary of the globalization of Chinese foreign relations in the 1980s, there is a paucity of articles and books specifically keyed to China’s own concept of security.<sup>7</sup> One interesting and revealing exception is a commissioned monograph entitled “On China’s Concept of Security,” written in 1985 or 1986 by Ms. Song Yimin, Head for the Studies of World Politics, Institute of International Studies, Beijing, for the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). This monograph may be

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accepted as reflecting the semi-official party line of the mid-1980s and, as such, a point of departure for examining China's concept of security as evolved and made manifest in numerous official and scholarly definitions of the changing international situation and the evolution of military doctrines.<sup>8</sup>

The post-Mao Chinese concept of security, as expounded by Song, is broad and multidimensional, involving not only military considerations but also political and economic factors. Obviously, China's security requires and demands a strong national defense, but it also implies political stability and unity as well as a sound and prosperous economy. More strikingly, there is no identification of the enemy as she advances the notion of global interdependence as China's security "is [circa mid-1980s] inseparably linked to world peace": "In the world today, economic interaction and interdependence are greater and more evident than ever before . . . The world has become one. No country can afford to seal itself from the outside."<sup>9</sup> To sum up: China's security = military strength + domestic political stability + national unification + prosperous economy + world peace. To reverse the formula, world peace depends on a strong China: "The more China develops, the greater the restraint for war, the greater the assurance for [world] peace."<sup>10</sup> Here we find China's late 19th century reformers' notion of "a rich state and a strong army" (*fu guo qiang bing*)—actually borrowed from Japan's Meiji reformers—as revised and updated to form a comprehensive yet materialist notion of security. What is also made loud and clear in Song's exposition of the Chinese concept of security is a kind of "hegemonic stability theory" with Chinese characteristics: world peace and stability depends on a strong China. As paramount leader Deng Xiaoping succinctly put it, "The stronger China grows, the better the chances are for preserving world peace."<sup>11</sup> Still, we need to accept Song's exposition as a time-specific (pre-Tiananmen) and a situation-specific (for the U.N. audience) conception of Chinese security.

What has remained unchanged in the post-Cold War era is the notion that a strong, stable and prosperous China is an irreducible prerequisite to world peace. Such thinking has found its way into various blends of *Pax Sinica* proposals in the course of China's first-ever grand debate on world order in the early 1990s.<sup>12</sup> What has changed is the Chinese concept of power, a subtle but significant shift from a normative to a material direction. Mao repeatedly stressed justice (normative power) as a critical component in the equation of national and international power. During the Maoist era, there was a recurring propensity to make a virtue out of weakness by defining Chinese power as a sum total of both material and normative power: "Though, for the time being, the output of some products is smaller on our side than in the imperialist countries, yet, since we are on the side of socialism, the socialist system plus a certain level of material strength gives us superiority in the entire balance of power."<sup>13</sup>

Faced with the demise of the strategic triangle, the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Gulf War, and the clear and present danger of the "new world order" all coming in rapid succession, the 14th Party Congress in late 1992 signaled an official closure to the decade-long debate about the structural reality of the international situation. Bipolarity is now pronounced to have ended as the international system is heading rapidly towards multipolarity. A multipolarizing world is cast in a new light as giving rise to new geopolitical alignments in the Asia-Pacific region and, concomitantly, intensified rivalry for "comprehensive national strength" (CNS, *zonghe guoli*), now the official party line on China's national security.<sup>14</sup> The CNS line easily translates itself into the definition of the post-Cold War world as a dangerous neo-Darwinian jungle where China's national security interests are best protected through unilateral security. Whether a country can succeed in global competition is said to depend upon the development of its high-tech industries. If China is to become a world power, it must attend to these industries, as it once did to the development of nuclear weapons and satellite programs.<sup>15</sup> There is no escape from

this high-tech rat race if China is ever to regain its proper place in the post-Cold War world. China has to be competitive with more powerful military/industrial powers if it is to beat them at their own game. Indeed, some strategic analysts see the relatively benign post-Cold War security environment as the unprecedented opportunity for accelerating the military modernization drive—and thus narrowing the military gap with Russia and the United States—without diverting too many resources from economic development. As two military analysts put it: “The relatively peaceful international climate and our friendly relations with our neighbors are providing fine external conditions for PLA weapons development.”<sup>16</sup>

Despite the situation-specific changes and shifts in Chinese definitions of the regional and global orders, then, there remains at the core a fundamentally Realpolitik view of the outside world as essentially conflictual where antagonistic contradictions and rivalries are the norm. At the same time, global debate on the new world order is said to be symptomatic of the emerging neo-Darwinian contest for an all-out struggle for power in which every major state actor jockeys for a favorable position during the process of tumultuous change.

Even during the “world peace/development line” period (mid-1984 to mid-1989), the Chinese leadership was ambivalent about the concept of global interdependence even as Chinese representatives made repeated references to the concept in global institutions. The CCP has never directly and explicitly endorsed the concept of global interdependence. In the post-Cold War and post-Tiananmen era, however, the concept of global interdependence came under assault. President Bush’s espousal of “a new world order” was attacked as the invisible integrationist hand of the conspiratorial peaceful evolution strategy that seeks to establish a “free” federation or a federation of ‘democratic countries’ on the basis of a common principle and common outlook and values (an integration similar to the Federation of Great Britain).” The Chinese came to view such a scheme as having a global reach that extends to Asia, Africa, and

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Latin America; that is, the United States “aims at bringing the entire world under its rule.”<sup>17</sup> The revised definition of the world situation, according to a classified Communist party document, rejects the core assumptions of the world peace/development line, warning instead that world politics has entered a new phase of “the struggle between the two systems.” Although varying “in its form, intensity and the tactics employed,” we are told, the two-system struggle “will be sharper, more complex and more intense than before.”<sup>18</sup> The major challenge that China will have to face and respond to in the next 15 years (1995-2010) is not one of managing global interdependence but a concerted Western plot to split and weaken China by giving support to separatists in minority localities, by exaggerating and taking advantage of the center/periphery contradictions, intraparty policy differences, state/society chasm, and by exerting pressure on such issues as “democracy” and “human rights.”<sup>19</sup>

Some international relations scholars have even resurrected the Maoist line espoused in the United Nations in the early 1970s that interdependence in the contemporary world economic system amounted to no more than an asymmetrical interdependence “between a horseman and his mount.” In the post-Cold War era interdependence in a world without a world government (anarchy) can fuel and accentuate zero-sum power politics by trampling on the sovereignty of weak states, by preventing weak states from controlling their economic, military and political resources, and by providing more opportunities for some states to interfere in the internal affairs of others.<sup>20</sup> Consider and contrast, for instance, Zhao Ziyang’s “world peace and development line” replete with the global interdependence theme in the mid-1980s with Jiang Zemin’s CNS line in 1992 challenging the military “should enhance combat strength in an all-around way; should more successfully shoulder the lofty mission of defending the country’s territorial sovereignty over the land and in the air, as well as its rights and interests on the sea; and should safeguard the unification and security of the motherland.”<sup>21</sup> Consider and contrast as well what Wang

Jisi, Director of the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, had to say on this matter in 1994, compared to what Song Yimin said in 1986:

In essence, China's leading political analysts doubt the virtue of what is referred to in the West as interdependence and globalization. They tend to see the world as increasingly chaotic and assertive nationalism and fierce economic competition as the main features of international relations. In their eyes world politics continues to involve a zero-sum game, and a hierarchy of power inevitably exists within which the more powerful nations dominate the weak.<sup>22</sup>

Military power as the most important component of the CNS is viewed as indispensable for China to regain its status as a leading world power and to defend against any threats, actual or imagined, to Chinese sovereignty and integrity. Without sufficient military power, according to China's strategic analysts, it will not be possible to successfully enact China's national identity as a world power or to play a decisive role in global politics. Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian spelled out without any prioritization the PLA's wish list: "We must have whatever other big powers have already had in their inventory."<sup>23</sup> The proposition that sufficient military power buys both deterrence and status reflects and effects internal debates about why China needs more and better high-tech weapons systems including nuclear weapons. "What has not changed in the post-Cold War era," as Johnston argues, "is a deeply rooted hard *realpolitik* worldview that nuclear weapons buy both soft power (international status and influence) and hard power (military operational power)."<sup>24</sup> Similarly, advocates of blue-water naval modernization speak not only of protecting oceanic shipping lanes, fishing grounds, and resources, but also of increasing China's "national awesomeness" (*guo wei*) and expanding "political influence" (*zhengzhi yingxiang*).<sup>25</sup>

All the same, the post-Cold War global situation is defined in terms of how it affects China's internal security as well as threats near abroad. Indeed, the blurring of the domestic and external divide is now acknowledged as one of

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the defining features of international relations in the post-Cold War era.<sup>26</sup> Of particular concern to China as a multinational state is that local and regional ethnonational conflicts, previously overshadowed and repressed by the global superpower contention, are breaking out in many parts of the world. Of the 89 armed conflicts between 1989 and 1992, all but three were, or are, “internal conflicts” and “state-formation” conflicts. Wars of national identity mobilization have emerged as the primacy species of regional conflict in the post-Cold War setting.<sup>27</sup> With the demise of the threat of direct military invasion, according to Yan Xuetong, a leading strategic analyst, China, too, is now plagued by ethnic separatism and border disputes, with “hyper-nationalism” (*jiduan minzuzhuyi*) having already made extensive inroads among China’s separatists in the post-Cold War setting.<sup>28</sup> China is “home” to about 16 million Muslims of various ethnonational minorities in the strategically vital province of Xinjiang (where Lop Nor nuclear test site is located) and as such acutely sensitive to the dangers of Muslim separatism fueled by worldwide Islamic fundamentalism. In the five-nation treaty of April 1996, China, Russia, and three former Soviet Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) have reached an understanding to join forces to combat the spread of fundamentalist Islamic movements within their respective borders.

The question as to what country presents the clear and present threat to China’s security—hence the enemy—remains unclarified in Chinese policy pronouncements. The evidence from internal discussions is ambiguous and contradictory. According to some secret reports from the Central Military Commission (CMC), leaked to and published in Hong Kong, a strong military cooperation with Russia is believed to be essential for breaking the Western embargo on military technology. In April 1993, Admiral Liu Huaqing, a standing committee member of the Politburo, was reported to have mobilized 50 top military officers to send an anti-U.S. petition in which the military “strongly oppose bartering away [China’s] principled criteria for state-to-state relations in exchange for bilateral trade.”<sup>29</sup> In

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a meeting with President Jiang Zemin on September 8, 1993, according to a Hong Kong journal with close ties with Beijing, eight senior generals led by Defense Minister Chi Haotian were said to have presented President Jiang with a petition signed by 180 high-ranking officers demanding that China “take a solemn and just stand” against the United States.<sup>30</sup> In early September 1993, two top-secret documents underscored the importance of building a new type of relations with Russia as “a new strategic move to prevent U.S. hegemonism from subverting China and intervening in the internal affairs of other Asian countries.”<sup>31</sup> And yet, a major PLA conference held in late 1993 to debate and determine China’s primary security threat was reported to have reached no consensus, only varying estimates, with about 50 percent of the participants believing the primary threat in the next century to be Japan, 40 percent believed the United States, while only 10 percent believed it would be a resurgent Russia.<sup>32</sup> As one *People’s Daily* commentator noted:

Gone are the days when a clear line between friend and foe could be drawn and confrontation between groups could be seen. A new picture, more complicated and characterized by a condition in which one is neither friend or foe or both friend and foe has emerged. Proceeding from their own basic interests, Russia, the United States, and other major Western powers attack, defend, charge, and retreat in the big chess board of international politics.<sup>33</sup>

With the sharp downturn in Sino-American relations since mid-1995, the conspiracy school seems to have gained ascendancy in China’s assessments of the international security environment. Many strategic analysts now argue that America’s China policy is “engagement” in word but “containment” in deed. Still, America’s “containment policy” is viewed in more political and ideological than military and strategic terms. Jiang Zemin’s 1992 authoritative assessment of China’s external security environment as “never been more satisfactory since the founding of the Republic” still remains largely unrevised.

The Gulf War demonstrated with particular clarity the type of warfare with which the Chinese armed forces would be tasked, triggering a doctrinal shift from the Dengist strategy of fighting people's war under modern conditions to a high-tech strategy of achieving a quick, decisive military victory in a matter of days. This shift to fighting and winning local wars under post-Cold War high-tech conditions was also aimed at developing a mobile, rapid-reaction, high-tech military force that is able to fight small "low intensity" border or near abroad conflicts. In keeping with the shift in general military doctrine, China has, from the late 1980s onward, moved toward a more flexible warfighting doctrine of limited nuclear deterrence requiring sufficient counterforce and countervalue tactical, theater, and strategic nuclear forces to deter the escalation of conventional or nuclear war.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most remarkable and potentially dangerous developments in the post-Cold War era is the rise of "*haiyang guotu guan*" (concept of sea as national territory). The Chinese people have been prodded to cultivate and cherish *haiyang guotu guan* so as to direct their attention to the unpleasant fact that it is China's maritime interests that have been encroached upon most alarmingly in recent history: "Territorial claims laid by foreign countries over China's maritime territory amounts up to one million square kilometers, ten times the size of China's disputed land border. By now, over thirty Chinese islands with surrounding waters are still in the hands of foreigners. Losses in maritime interests are really to be grieved and they call for our serious consideration."<sup>35</sup> As well, Chinese strategists now speak of the need for "survival space" (*shengcun kongjian*)—and for strategic frontiers that extend horizontally into the Indian Ocean, the South China and East China Seas, and vertically into space. A recent internal Chinese document states that the disputed island groups in the South China Sea, some of them situated nearly 1,000 kilometers south of China's Hainan island province and most of them subject to conflicting jurisdictional claims,<sup>36</sup> could provide *lebensraum* for the Chinese people. Consonant with such a concept of sea as national territory

and China's *lebensraum* in the coming years, China's naval military doctrine has shifted from the coastal defense of the mainland to active defense of maritime economic, resource, and strategic interests. Based on such doctrinal ground, China's naval exercises and gunboat operations have extended progressively further away from coastal waters in the 1990s.

## **CHINA'S SECURITY BEHAVIOR**

The point central to understanding China's quest for security and identity is to recognize that, since the collapse of the traditional Sinocentric world order in the late 19th century, this proud and frustrated Asian giant has had enormous difficulty finding a comfortable niche as an equal member state in the family of nation-states. Even during the Cold War years, Beijing's security behavior was beyond compare. Beijing has had difficulties in maintaining enduring friendship with any Asian state. Beijing has established by choice or by necessity a track record that no other country could possibly match: it had an alliance as well as a Cold War relationship with the socialist superpower, both of which proved to be inconclusive; it had a war and a quasi-alliance relationship with the capitalist superpower, both of which proved to be short-lived. Beijing's relations with New Delhi also shifted from the accommodative friendship of the mid-1950s to the Sino-Indian border war in 1962. In the mid-1960s, Sino-Indonesian relations abruptly veered from near-alliance to extreme hostility, and in the late 1970s, Sino-Vietnamese relations rather unexpectedly deteriorated from "boundless affection and assistance" to hot and then cold war. Thus, the People's Republic succumbed to wild swings of national identity enactment, mutating through a series of roles: self-sacrificing junior partner in the Soviet-led socialist world; self-reliant hermit completely divorced from and fighting both superpowers; the revolutionary vanguard of an alternative United Nations; self-styled Third World champion of a New International Economic Order; *status quo*-maintaining "partner" of NATO and favored recipient

of largess at the World Bank; and, now, lone socialist global power in a postcommunist world. None of these identities has much to do with Asian regional identity. The vast gap between being and becoming in the drive for status—and the contradiction between being a regional power and having global aspirations—have introduced a fundamental paradox in the prioritization of China's multiple identities.

### **Regional Security Behavior.**

China's regional security behavior seems to be propelled by unilateralism in bilateral clothing with little Asian regionalism. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's Pacific overtures in 1986-88 for a comprehensive cooperative security system for the entire Asia-Pacific region were countermaned and scaled back to the *bilateral* negotiating level in order to pressure the Soviets to meet China's three security demands (the so-called Three Obstacles) as the price for renormalizing Sino-Soviet relations. Beijing quashed Australian, Canadian, and Japanese proposals for a multilateral Asia-Pacific security conference—a sort of Conference on Security and Cooperation in Asia (CSCA). Likewise, Beijing categorically rejected any international conference, let alone the establishment of a multilateral regime for handling territorial disputes, maintaining instead that disputes should be resolved by the countries directly involved on a *bilateral* basis. The multinational conflict over the Paracel (Xisha in Chinese) and Spratly (Nansha in Chinese) Island groups in the South China Sea underlines the dialectics of Chinese conflict-making and conflict-coping behavior. While Chinese diplomats often talk about international cooperation for the pacific settlement of disputes, Chinese strategists reject the proposition that the seabed resources of disputed areas in the South China Sea should be jointly developed, while shelving the issue of sovereignty.

The disputed Paracel and Spratly Island groups have become a dangerous flashpoint in the Asia-Pacific region. No less than six states—Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam—have competing

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jurisdictional claims over the potentially oil-rich Spratly Islands. China, Taiwan, and Vietnam lay claim to all the Spratly Islands, while the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei claim parts of them. The Spratly and Paracel Islands also straddle sea lanes vital to Asia-Pacific states, adding geo-strategic and geo-economic dimensions to the simmering conflict. China, Taiwan, and Japan are also locked in dispute over the Diaoyu (Senkaku in Japanese) Islands farther north in the East China Sea. To possess the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, which comprise five islands some 166 km northeast of Taiwan, is to have legal jurisdiction over about 21,645 square kilometers of the continental shelf which is believed to be one of the last unexplored hydrocarbon resource areas in the world.

The conventional wisdom that Beijing would leave ASEAN countries alone in its southward expansionism in the South China Sea, concentrating all of its shots at the weakest link—Vietnam, was shattered on February 8, 1995, when Filipinos woke up to find a Chinese flag fluttering on Mischief Reef just 200 or so kilometers from Palawan Island. Although the reef is well within Manila's 200-mile exclusive economic zone—recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) that entered into force in 1994—the best President Fidel Ramos could do was to come up with the “right is might” normative response as well as to depict the Chinese “might is right” occupation as a multilateral, not bilateral, challenge for the ASEAN to deal with. The Chinese raid on Mischief Reef has been made all the more shocking by China's separate claim to some of Indonesia's gas fields. In 1994 Indonesia discovered that, according to China's cartography, its Natuna gas field, well within its 200-mile exclusive economic zone, now lies within Chinese waters. Apparently, quiet behind-the-scenes bilateral probing met only Chinese stonewalling. On April 10, 1995, Jakarta went public on this issue, apparently triggered by China's occupation of Mischief Reef and ASEAN's strongest statement yet on the South China Sea 3 weeks later.

Beijing's incremental advances into the Spratlys and beyond seem to proceed based on the logic that occupation is nine-tenths of the law. As one of the world's largest coastal states with a coastline of approximately 11,000 kilometers and another 10,000 kilometers surrounding its 3,416 islands, China is a major beneficiary of UNCLOS that accepted and encoded the Latin American demand for the 200-mile exclusive economic zone (Article 57). That China has yet to ratify the UNCLOS speaks directly to the politics of unilateral security in the Spratlys.

China's advance into the Spratlys and beyond is primarily an extension of domestic politics. At the 1991 session of the National People's Congress (NPC), 31 deputies representing China's coastal provinces and municipalities signed a motion calling for the enactment of a "law of the seas" as soon as possible to protect China's interests and marine resources. China today regards the disputed but oil-rich Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea in terms all too reminiscent of the Third Reich's *lebensraum* imperial policy.

The picture that emerges from recent Chinese internal military writings is that war is still considered preferable to the appearance of surrendering sovereign claims in the South China Sea to a group of small Southeast Asian states. Violent conflict over the resources of the South China Sea is considered a real possibility in the next 10 years. Against this backdrop, the NPC adopted on February 25, 1992, "The Law of the People's Republic of China on Its Territorial Waters and Their Contiguous Areas" to empower the PRC to exercise "its sovereignty over its territorial waters and its rights to exercise control over their adjacent areas, and to safeguard state security as well as its maritime rights and interests" (Article 1). Article 2 stipulates China's territorial sovereignty as including "the mainland and its offshore islands, Taiwan and the various affiliated islands including Diaoyu [Senkaku] Islands, Penghu Islands, Dongsha Islands, Xisha [Paracel] Islands, Nansha [Spratly] Islands, and other islands that belong to the PRC" (Article 2).<sup>37</sup> The law vests the Chinese military with the right to remove by

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force any incursion on the stipulated islands and areas. President Jiang Zemin issued a clarion call that the military "should enhance combat strength in an all-around way; should more successfully shoulder the lofty mission of defending the country's territorial sovereignty over the land and in the air, as well as its rights and interests on the sea; and should safeguard the unification and security of the motherland."<sup>38</sup> As if to add credibility to this assertion, Beijing announced in May 1992 that it had signed a contract with a U.S. oil company, Crestone Energy Corporation, to explore oil in a block contiguous to an offshore Vietnamese oil field. The president of Crestone has claimed that the operation will be protected by the Chinese Navy. In June 1992 China landed troops on a reef claimed by Vietnam and set up a "sovereignty post."

It is reported that some 400 "Chinese scholars completed 10 years of research on the Spratly Islands in late 1994 to prove historically that China discovered and developed the Spratly Islands." A group of former American military leaders who visited China in late 1994 has also reported that China is mobilizing a limited military force "capable of rapid response" designed to protect China's claims in the South China Sea as a matter of national priority. Admiral Liu Huaqing, the only military member of the ruling standing committee of the Politburo and former chief of the PLAN, has been a leading advocate for seizing the rich mineral and fishing grounds of the South China Sea to support China's burgeoning population.<sup>39</sup>

For China, in short, there is little room for compromise, largely because of the conflation of sovereignty, security, status, and "lateral pressure." With the energy demands rising and oil supplies falling, China for the first time became in 1993 a net importer of oil. China is in favor of the peaceful settlement of disputes, we are told, but opposes the internationalization of the Spratlys issue. Since the Spratly Islands have been Chinese territory since ancient times, the possibility of internationalization does not exist. This unilateralism conjures up the image of China as a determined irredentist power that has resorted to the use

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of force outside its existing borders in more conflicts and more often than any other East Asian state. China stands out as one of the 10 most “crisis active states” in the international system during the 50-year period 1929-79, with all but one of its foreign policy crises deriving from the core issue of national security and occurring along the peripheries of what it regards as “sacred home territory,” whether so recognized or not by others. In contrast with the Guomindang period of 1929-49, the overwhelming choice of conflict-coping and crisis-managing techniques during the post-1949 PRC era was violence.<sup>40</sup>

The broader point is that China has yet to resort to military force purely on behalf of the communist revolutionary cause, nor has China used its military power recklessly in a manner befitting naked aggression. In expounding “principled stand,” Chinese scholars and publicists repeatedly and categorically state that China will never occupy an inch of foreign territory, nor will it yield an inch of Chinese territory. The problem obviously lies in the expansive definition of Chinese territory. In domestic politics no Chinese leader can afford to appear soft on such highly-charged nationalistic issues. Southward gunboat diplomacy may have also been spurred by the belief that other claimants as well as the global community, on the basis of past behavior, are unlikely to react strongly against Chinese coercive diplomacy. Equally significant is the fact that the post-Cold War strategic environment in this contested area presents a timely challenge and opportunity for the Chinese military to demonstrate its blue-water naval power and for the Chinese government to project national identity as the unstoppable up-and-coming superpower in the Asia-Pacific region.

Nonetheless, China’s gunboat diplomacy has injected new life into ASEAN as a regional organization, just when the U.N.-brokered peace settlement in Cambodia seemed to have removed Vietnam as a common thread that held the six member states together. The 1992 Manila Declaration was obviously addressed to China as a rallying point for ASEAN to have its regional security act together in this

unsettling post-Cold War transitional setting. Faced with the rising chorus of the “China threat theory” (*Zhongguo weixian lun*)—Beijing gave birth to this theory in 1992—and the initiative for East Asian multilateral security dialogue in the ASEAN countries, China began in 1992 to soften, slightly and ambiguously, its unilateral security line. While dismissing a unified multilateral security mechanism such as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as completely inappropriate to the diversity of the Asia-Pacific region, China suggested “to establish gradually a bilateral, subregional, and regional multichannel and multilayered security dialogue mechanism so as to hold consultations on the issues concerned and to strengthen interchange and confidence.”<sup>41</sup> At the July 1994 meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), however, China successfully threw its weight to keep the Spratly issue off the agenda.

China’s strike against the Philippines in 1995 has already given another shot in the arm of the ARF, bringing China into direct confrontation not only with a communist neighbor but also, more importantly, a noncommunist member of ASEAN. China’s “divide-and-conquer” strategy seemed to have received a serious blow when ASEAN issued a joint statement on March 18, 1995, calling for a peaceful resolution of the dispute. At the first-ever Sino-ASEAN bilateral meeting in April 1995, held in the Chinese provincial city of Hangzhou, China softened its stand, giving its assurances about its peaceful intentions and retreating from its claim to the Natuna Islands. From mid-1995 on, Beijing pursued a Jekyll-and-Hyde diplomacy with Chinese diplomats abroad, giving assurances that China is now willing to *discuss* with parties concerned over the Spratlys dispute “in line with established principles and international law and modern maritime law, including the basic principles and rules enshrined in the UNCLOS,”<sup>42</sup> even as the PLAN continues to occupy Mischief Reef and shows no signs of dismantling its military structures in the area. Taking advantage of global attention turned to the crisis in the Taiwan Strait in early 1996, Beijing has quietly

set up more “scientific expedition posts” in the disputed Spratly Islands.

All the same, Chinese strategists began to give more expansive definitions and claims of China’s continental shelf with a warning: “Greater indoctrination in an ocean concept to increase awareness of the oceans, to inculcate a strong concept of the oceans as national territory, and of cherishing every inch of China’s ocean territory is a matter of major importance having a bearing on the survival and development of China’s posterity.”<sup>43</sup> With Vietnam’s entry into ASEAN in July 1995, the quiet days of ARF’s low-key approach to East Asian security may well be numbered. An increasingly assertive unilateral China now encounters the flowering of a much-dreaded balance of coalition-building, not only at the multilateral ARF level but also at the bilateral level (i.e., the 1995 Indonesia-Australia defense accord and the 1996 U.S.-Japan Joint Security Declaration).

China’s response to the rise of a nascent ARF-based regional cooperative security mechanisms seemed Janus-faced. On the one hand, China’s post-Cold War strategy of guaranteeing national security is said to be a “three-in-one strategy” of strengthening the modernization of national defense, supporting regional cooperation in guaranteeing security to reduce the hidden danger of military conflicts, and developing good-neighborly relations to increase mutual trust.<sup>44</sup> And yet, China’s post-Cold War security strategy, as revealed in an internal document on January 28, 1995, indicates otherwise. According to the document, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and military have agreed to oppose any idea of establishing an Asian collective security scheme, as proposed by Japan and other countries. Such a regional collective security system would increase the possibility that southeast Asian nations may rehash their arguments over the Chinese threat theory, especially over the Spratly Islands dispute and thus impinge too closely on Beijing’s expansive regional security zone for comfort.<sup>45</sup>

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## Global Security Behavior.

To a significant extent, the post-Cold War challenge of preventing, controlling, restraining, weakening, or encapsulating regional armed conflicts has devolved on the Security Council. Having extricated itself from the paralysis of East-West confrontation, the Security Council has decided not to let state sovereignty get in its way of intervening in certain situations perceived to be threatening international peace or collective moral consciousness of the world community. Against this backdrop and at the request of the first-ever Security Council Summit in late January 1992, Secretary-General Boutros-Boutros-Ghali issued 6 months later a landmark report entitled “An Agenda for Peace,” calling upon the Member States, in particular upon the Perm Five, to redefine state sovereignty to strengthen the world organization’s capacity for preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace-keeping, and post-conflict peace-building. While paying the mandatory lip service to the principle of state sovereignty, the Secretary-General made it clear what is required for the world organization to meet the rising demands of people’s security: “The time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty, however, has passed; its theory was never matched by reality.”<sup>46</sup>

Of the Perm Five, China has jumped the gun by projecting the most skeptical posture toward Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s *Agenda for Peace*.<sup>47</sup> Apparently, the Secretary-General’s report contained too many sovereignty-diluting features, thus provoking Beijing’s public opposition: “U.N. reform should contribute to maintaining the sovereignty of its member states. Sovereign states are the subjects of international law and the foundation for the formation of the United Nations. The maintenance of state sovereignty serves as the basis for the establishment of a new international order.”<sup>48</sup> More specifically, China argued that all the activities of the United Nations, whether in preventive diplomacy or peacemaking, whether in peacekeeping or post-conflict peace-building, should strictly observe the principles of

state sovereignty and of non-interference in the internal affairs of Member States.<sup>49</sup>

In practice, China's position on U.N. peacekeeping has shifted over the years, although within the parameters of state sovereignty, evolving through three distinct periods: (1) opposition/nonparticipation (1971-81); (2) support/participation (1982-89); and (3) retreat/participation (1990-present). The Gulf crisis marks the beginning of the retreat/participation period. Despite the publicly expressed support for U.N. peacekeeping between 1982 and 1989, the first litmus test showed that the maxi/mini strategy disguised in the legitimizing principle of state sovereignty remains the bottom line of China's indeterminate strategy in the Security Council. In the face of both America's military victory under the banner of Security Council Resolution 678 and the growing number of U.N. peacemaking and state-making activities in 1991-92, China retreated by redefining its stand in a contingent manner. Suddenly, it is now argued that peacekeeping operations can only be established and conducted in compliance with the principle of non-interference in internal affairs as the U.N. Charter does not authorize involvement in the internal disputes of its member states.<sup>50</sup>

Tellingly, China has exerted considerable influence not by hyperactive positive engagement but by following an indeterminate reactive strategy vacillating between tacit cooperation and aloofness. Except on the issues of Taiwan's U.N. bid (national identity), North Korea (sanctions and strategic interest), and Rwanda (genocide), the Chinese have been passive and reactive to a fault waiting to see what positions other states take before staking out its own position, usually in the end game of a negotiating process. For post-Tiananmen China, afflicted with the twin legitimization crises at home and abroad, international sanctions, especially U.S.-sponsored sanctions against North Korea, triggers the sound and fury response of state sovereignty. There is another logic driving Chinese behavior on the North Korean issue in the Security Council. As one Security Council representative put it,

And they [PRC representatives] used the North Korean debate as a case to illustrate a deeper point—If you can't force the North Koreans to do what you want, how do you imagine you could ever force the Chinese to do anything? Nothing can be done against the Chinese . . . We lobbied them as part of the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) countries on the Bosnia and the Haiti missions. Again, they believe in *bilateral dealing*, they come, they smile, they leave.<sup>51</sup>

China's voting behavior in the Security Council is closely keyed to and conditioned by its maxi-mini diplomacy. Despite its "principled opposition" to a wide range of issues in the Security Council, China has consistently expressed its opposition in the form of "nonparticipation in the vote" in the early post-entry years and abstention in recent years. From 1990 to 1994, China abstained 22 times, voted affirmatively with reservations 10 times, and voted affirmatively on the remainder of Security Council resolutions (of which some were passed under Chapter VII), without exercising its veto even once. Of the 22 resolutions in which China abstained, 13 were explicitly Chapter VII enforcement measures. Thus, China is sometimes forced to affirm a resolution (as in the case of resolution 827 on international war crimes tribunal in Bosnia) which violates its most cherished principle of the nonviolability of state sovereignty with nothing more than the habit-driven pronouncement of "principled position."<sup>52</sup> The most obvious explanation for such behavior is the desire to retain its maximum leverage believed to be inherent in its indeterminate strategy of becoming all things to all nations on all serious threats to international peace and security. To abstain is to apply the Chinese code of conduct of being firm in principle but flexible in application or to find a face-saving exit with voice in cases where they pose conflicting Realpolitik geopolitical interests and Idealpolitik normative concerns for international reputation. In short, the pattern that emerges with respect to China's voting behavior in the Council, particularly abstentions on Chapter VII enforcement resolutions, is neither positive engagement nor destructive obstruction, but one of

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pursuing the maxi-mini strategy in a situation-specific and self-serving way.

Despite the habitual claim that support for and solidarity with the Third World is a basic principle in Chinese foreign policy, China has emerged as the most independent self-centered actor in global group politics, a veritable Group of 1 (G-1). Even in such a multilateral setting, China makes its preference for bilateralism over multilateralism loud and clear. While giving rhetorical support to the idea of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula (who doesn't?), Beijing has repeatedly denied any role or responsibility as the Korean nuclear issue is said to be directly and exclusively a dispute between the DPRK on the one hand, and the United States, IAEA, and ROK on the other. At the same time, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen made it clear on many occasions that his government is not only opposed to economic sanctions, but also against bringing up the issue at all in the IAEA and the Security Council. What intensifies Beijing's security concern and its opposition to the unification-by-absorption scenario is the perception of U.S. strategy on the Korean nuclear issue. "To put it bluntly," as one pro-PRC newspaper in Hong Kong writes, "the United States wants to use this chance to topple the DPRK, and this is a component of U.S. strategy to carry out peaceful evolution in the socialist countries." And the United States "will practice a strategy of destruction against North Korea—the last Stalinist regime in the world—with the aim of enabling South Korea to gobble up North Korea, like West Germany gobbling up East Germany." Such U.S. strategy poses not only an ideological challenge but, more significantly, a strategic threat as "China regards the Korean region as an important buffer zone between China and the United States."<sup>53</sup>

The nature of the Chinese position on the question of U.N. institutional reform, especially on the expansion of Security Council membership, has remained cautious, noncommittal, and reactive. The logic of defensive mechanisms is obvious. Beijing has a vested symbolic and real interest in keeping the Security Council exactly as it is. Not only would an increase in the number of permanent

membership dilute its own influence, but any changes in the use of veto power would also reduce its leverage. China often gets what it wants through the threat to use its veto power. Any successful expansion of permanent membership would inevitably emasculate its status and leverage as the only non-Western, Third World country in the cockpit of U.N. politics. One Chinese international relations scholar goes as far as echoing the Soviet party line in the 1970s—since the veto is the keystone of the existence of the United Nations, it should not be tampered with or even restricted in its usage.<sup>54</sup>

With the demise of the strategic triangle and the growing marginalization of the China factor in the normative domain of global politics, China's permanent membership in the Security Council remains the only diplomatic way it can portray itself as a global power. As well, the veto power serves as a fungible instrument of renewable influence and leverage in the service of China-specific interests. Like nuclear weapons, the real power of the veto lies not so much in its actual use as in the threat to use or not to use. Paradoxically, the Taiwan factor in Beijing's quest for absolute legitimization expands the limits of the possible and permissible in widening China's own official diplomatic network. The unusually swift recognition of 12 newly minted independent states in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 was prompted by fear that Taiwan would jump the gun. The single greatest leverage Beijing had in this connection was its veto power in the Security Council and the threat to use it in blocking the entry of any of these newly formed states into the world organization—no prior acceptance of the Beijing formula for its absolute legitimization, no U.N. entry.<sup>55</sup>

There is also a sense in which such a *pro forma* establishment of diplomatic networking is to make a virtue of necessity, bespeaking a deep anxiety about the viability of one sovereign, unified, multinational Chinese state amid turbulent global politics and growing ethnonational conflicts in many trouble spots of the world. With the recent revival of Taiwan's U.N. bid, Beijing's veto power has been

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publicly touted as the powerful sword and impregnable shield that defend the integrity of People's China as the only legitimate Chinese government in the United Nations. It seems that the United Nations in general, and the Security Council in particular, have suddenly become important in direct proportion to the diminution of Beijing's internal security and external reputation. Thanks to Beijing's solo obstructive behavior in the Haitian case in the Security Council in late February 1996, the image of the self-styled champion for the Third World got burned beyond easy repair. As one participant put it, "It was conduct unbecoming a permanent council member and was especially galling because China portrays itself as the champion of the downtrodden and a leader of developing nations, which it stiffed throughout."<sup>63</sup>

China's security behavior in the highly sensitive domain of arms control and disarmament (ACD) is fraught with 56biguities and contradictions inherent in its balancing act between Realpolitik interests and idealpolitik concerns.<sup>57</sup> In 25 years of U.N. participation, Beijing's public position has progressively shifted from initial dismissive non-participation (the 1970s), to reluctant selective participation (the 1980s), to comprehensive entrapped participation (the 1990s) in various ACD regimes, especially in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva. As if to demonstrate that there is more than meets the suspicious eye in such posturing, however, China in 1982-92 has acceded to 10 of the 12 multilateral ACD conventions.<sup>58</sup> During the first half of the 1990s, China officially acceded to the NPT (March 1992), finally signaled in September 1993 its willingness to directly participate in negotiations for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), indicated a willingness to conclude the treaty by the end of 1996, and accepted strict parameters of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) regarding sale of missiles through a bilateral agreement with the United States in October 1994.

Still, the unstated code of conduct guiding China's consecutive and simultaneous participation in multiple

security games on multiple chessboards is a *maxi/mini axiom*—the maximization of security benefits via free-riding and/or defection strategies and the minimization of normative (image) costs. Since its entry into global ACD regimes and negotiations in the early 1980s, China translated its self-help realpolitik into the espousal of differentiated rights and responsibilities in the global ACD processes, assiduously avoiding commitments that would place constraints on its own nuclear weapons development.<sup>59</sup> Since the two superpowers account for the bulk of nuclear weapons, it is they who must bear the primary responsibility by drastically reducing their nuclear arsenals before other nuclear weapons states can join the disarmament process. The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-I) and START-II that will reduce each nuclear superpower's strategic arsenal by about three-fourths (to fewer than 3,500 warheads) seem to have no discernable impact on China's ACD behavior. While acknowledging and characterizing these treaties as "some initial progress," China insists that such progress is still preliminary and limited, and that the two nuclear superpowers still have a long way go in the process of nuclear disarmament. Pending the realization of

complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons, however, all nuclear-weapon states should undertake the following commitments: 1) not to be the first to use nuclear weapons and conclude an international agreement on the no-first-use principle; 2) not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States and nuclear weapon-free zones and conclude an international agreement in this regard; and 3) to support the proposals for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, and undertake the corresponding obligations.<sup>60</sup>

In this way, China projects its role as a constructive and positive player in the U.N. disarmament game without constraining its own nuclear development. Not surprisingly, the Third World's long-standing demand to halve all nuclear tests fell on China's deaf ears until 1993. Since a comprehensive nuclear test ban and nuclear disarmament are linked, the United States and Russia "have the

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obligation to take the lead in halting all nuclear tests *and* carrying out drastic nuclear disarmament so as to create conditions for a comprehensive ban on nuclear tests.”<sup>61</sup>

In light of such free-riding/defection strategy, Beijing’s declaration of its willingness to participate in CTBT negotiations in the fall of 1993 constitutes, potentially, a significant shift from unilateral security to security interdependence and an important constraint on the further development and testing of its nuclear weapons program. Yet, once inside the CTBT negotiation processes, China has been behaving in a realist self-help fashion, trying hard to slow, divert, and delay the completion of the CTBT that would constrain its nuclear testing program. China, in the home stretch of a negotiating process, has injected several preconditions for successful completion of the treaty that are not acceptable to other participants in the CTBT negotiations, i.e., (1) the right of declared nuclear weapons states to conduct peaceful nuclear explosions (PNEs), (2) no first use pledge (NFU), and (3) negative security commitments (NSC) by the nuclear weapons states. The official position is that China will put an end to its nuclear tests once the consensually-arrived treaty enters into effect. Having thus committed to halting its nuclear tests after the treaty comes into effect, China has proposed a lengthy ratification procedure leading to entry into effect of the CTBT following its signing, arousing suspicions among many states that Beijing is determined to delay CTBT negotiations as long as possible and with as many preconditions and delaying tactics as possible, so as to allow its military to complete as many underground nuclear tests as possible for the accelerated modernization of its nuclear warheads. Indeed, on March 29, 1996, hopes of the 38-member CD to wrap up 2-year CTBT negotiations by June 1996 and send a consensus treaty to the U.N. General Assembly by September 1996 more or less collapsed. The CD adjourned for a recess of more than 6 weeks due largely to China’s PNEs demand at odds with the other four declared nuclear weapons states, even as Chinese disarmament ambassador Sha Zukang publicly declared that “no country can impose its will on China under any

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circumstances.”<sup>62</sup> Faced with President Yeltsin’s jawboning to sign the CTBT, China came up with a new escape clause—“mankind needs to keep developing ‘peaceful’ nuclear weapons in case a giant asteroid is discovered careering through space on a collision course with the earth.”<sup>63</sup>

The pattern of Chinese ACD behavior in the implementation process is one of “who me?” denial, double-talk, and responsibility shifting. In selling proscribed weapons of mass destruction to rogue regimes, Beijing takes extraordinary precautions to elude international detection. Only in the face of irrefutable evidence directly linking Beijing to Third World customers, has it confirmed missile or nuclear technology sales. Once such evidence is uncovered, Beijing either cites its nonproliferation pledges since 1984 or, more recently, its accession to the NPT regime as *prima facie* evidence of its full compliance with the regime norms, or insists that what have been sold are for peaceful uses only. China then seeks to shift responsibility for ensuring the peaceful uses of its nuclear technology to its customers and the IAEA. All the same, China often makes a broad liberal construction of the regime rules and norms that its NPT commitment cannot take effect retroactively and/or that the specifications of the missiles which it has sold fall outside the scope of the regime norms. China even insists on the redefining the Middle East for purposes of arms sales limitations so as to exclude its own major customers (Algeria and Libya) but to include Turkey (a major U.S. customer).<sup>64</sup>

With the collapse of the strategic triangle, the temptation to use, by way of substitution, whatever other instrumentalities Beijing possessed became well-nigh irresistible. It was in this context of the post-Cold War and post-communist world politics that the Chinese leadership found the arms sales, especially in the nuclear and missile field, as another way of demonstrating its status as a global power, and that festering regional conflicts in the Third World, especially in the Middle East, could not be resolved without China’s participation and tacit cooperation. The

conventional view that Chinese arms sales patterns and directions follow the logic of market demand factor—and that economic power in post-Mao China grows out of cash sales on the arms barrelhead—is not so much wrong as it is incomplete. China's missile sales to Saudi Arabia—*Dong Feng 3* (CSS-2) intermediate-range ballistic missiles—earned not only hard currency but also a much-sought diplomatic switch from Taipei to Beijing (on July 21, 1990). Despite its refusal to recognize Israel until the Palestinian question is solved, Beijing has maintained covert military ties with that country since 1980 and finally recognized and established official diplomatic relations in early 1992. It is widely believed that Israel has emerged in the post-Tiananmen years as China's leading foreign supplier of advanced technology, becoming in effect China's “back door” to U.S. technology.<sup>65</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The preceding analysis of China's quest for security in the post-Cold War world leads to one obvious and somewhat paradoxical conclusion. Despite the ritualistic and habit-driven assault on “power politics,” Beijing has emerged as perhaps the most unabashed practitioner of power politics in the post-Cold War setting. Beijing's own security thinking and behavior seemed firmly embedded in the realpolitik track, allowing only hypernationalist calculus to play a dominant role, with a smaller role for international security interdependence and no role for common security.<sup>66</sup> Despite the participation in the Security Council and global ACD fora for more than two decades, there is little evidence of any fundamental paradigm shift from unilateral to cooperative security. The notion of security interdependence in an increasingly interactive and interdependent world that one state's security is increased, not reduced, only when other neighboring states also feel secure, or that China's own unilateral self-help behavior could not easily escape from the reactive—and self-fulfilling—dynamics, remains yet to find its way clear to

## China's security thinking and behavior in the post-Cold War world.

This is not to deny the rise of an ACD policy community at home and the dramatic increase in China's participation in and commitment to multilateral ACD conventions including the NPT. But all the policy shifts in the 1980s and 1990s can be better seen as adaptive realpolitik rather than a fundamental change in the strategic paradigm or worldview. China has exploited, and will probably continue to exploit, its participation in international ACD regimes and negotiations as a more cost-effective way of learning how to defect or free-ride within, rather than without, these regimes. In attempting to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable—unilateral realpolitik security interests versus idealpolitik concerns for its international reputation—Beijing latches itself onto the declarations of its antihegemonism and no-first-use pledge as both necessary and sufficient conditions for peace and stability in the region, indeed as the surest and shortest pathway to global peace. In this way China projects its “principled stand” on a range of ACD issues, asking others to follow what China says, not what China actually does.

The driving force for such realpolitik behavior is not any sense of a military threat from any external power but the leadership's resolve to project its national identity as an up-and-coming superpower in the Asia-Pacific region, so as to make up for the growing domestic legitimization and security deficits. The dogged determination to enact and legitimize national identity in terms of state sovereignty, state status, and state security defines the parameters of China's quest for security in the post-Cold War setting, conditioning Beijing's response to regional and global cooperative security mechanisms and processes. The mounting international outcry against China's perfidious behavior on human rights abuses at home, nuclear weapons or missile proliferation, maritime expansionism in the South China Sea, and missile diplomacy against Taiwan is increasingly viewed as a Western conspiracy led by Washington to carry out a “peaceful evolution” (*heping*

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*yanbian*) or “divide-and-conquer” strategy of winning war without firing a single shot and thus arresting China’s accelerated march to the promised land of superpowerdom.

Paradoxically, post-Tiananmen China is at one and the same time *a growing regional military power*—and a major *non-status quo* power—with extensive irredentist claims to territories and islands along and beyond its periphery throughout the Asia-Pacific region as well as *an insecure and weak status quo state* at home. Contrary to the popular notion, the PRC today is *a weak state pretending and trying desperately to be a strong state*. The defining and differentiating feature of a weak state is the lack of a unifying national ethic or legitimizing ideology and the correspondingly high level of violence or power to cope with domestically generated threats to the security of the government.<sup>67</sup> Faced with such a legitimacy-cum-identity crisis, the CCP leadership has shifted toward perform-ance-based legitimization to enhance system effectiveness via “market Leninism” and flexing its military muscle power “near abroad” (the Spratlys and Taiwan). That is, the post-Tiananmen leadership is seizing geo-economic and geo-strategic opportunities abroad (the global marketplace and the power vacuum in the post-Cold War Asia-Pacific region) to cope with legitimization and identity threats at home (fragmentation). When the PRC’s official national identity and legitimization are blocked in one domain, as earlier postulated, the leadership seeks to compensate in another. Hyper-militarism, hyper-nationalism, and mercantile diplomacy are synergistically linked to form a tripod of security policy in the post-Cold War era, buying performance-based legitimization. In short, as China becomes more insecure and fragmented at home, it feels more compelled to demonstrate its toughness abroad.

The legitimization-cum-identity crisis has been accentuated as well by a deep anxiety about other competing processes of national identity mobilization among Muslims in Xinjiang, Mongols in inner Mongolia, Tibetans in Tibet, Chinese in Hong Kong, and island-born Taiwanese in

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Taiwan. What makes the sound and fury of state sovereignty all the more compelling, yet problematic in the Chinese case, is the unresolved unification problem coupled with the twin challenges of globalization from above and without and substate ethnonational fragmentation from below and within. Lacking charismatic and rational-legal legitimacy, the post-Tiananmen third-generation leadership instinctively invokes the party-state's last remaining source of—and indeed its ultimate claim to—legitimacy grounded in the national-identity enacting mission of restoring China's great-power status in the world. Chinese hypernationalism disguised as state sovereignty has become a sword with which to cope with a host of domestic threats and a shield with which to ward off any external normative challenge. Thus, the Chinese leadership seemed unable and unwilling to manage the rising tension between nationalism and internationalism or to make the necessary compromises on issues of sovereignty relating to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, Spratlys, Senkakus, and the remaining irredentist claims to territory held by many of China's 16 neighboring countries.

Yet fighting ethnonationalist separatist fire with Han hypernationalist fire can easily backfire. China's basic security dilemma here is not only ethnonationally charged but geo-strategically entangled, as more than 80 million minority nationality people (or about 8 percent of the total population), reside in the strategically sensitive but politically "autonomous" regions that account for roughly 64 percent of Chinese territory. The image of sovereign Kazahks, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Mongols in the post-Cold War setting of substate fragmentation and rising ethnonationalism could prove too inspiring for the non-Han peoples in Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet to put up with their suppressed national identities.

Clearly, China encounters here a "too little, too much" dilemma in its domestic/foreign policy. The latest round of coercive missile diplomacy against Taiwan may well have been catalyzed by the belief in a domino theory with Chinese characteristics—if Taiwan goes its separate way, what next?

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Today's Russia may not necessarily be tomorrow's China, but the challenge of transforming multiple "Chinas"—Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang and more—into one unified, coherent and stable multinational state, with two or more systems, without much bloodletting or federalism seems like a mission nearly impossible.

There is little doubt that the rise of the China chorus made possible by China's remarkable economic growth and assertive nationalism has bought some political legitimacy for the Chinese leadership. And yet, paradoxically, the rise of China thesis comes at a time of a rapid deterioration of the coherence of the Chinese state. State sovereignty no longer provides the center with security or control, as domestic, social, political, demographic, and environmental problems in Beijing's march to the promised land of superpowerdom are becoming legion. How can the wobbly edifice of the Chinese national security state survive the multiplying threats from within? Despite the unprecedented economic growth and an all-time global record in doubling *per capita* output in the shortest time period in the history of the global political economy (1977-87),<sup>68</sup> hundreds of thousands of Chinese are escaping from their homeland in search of better economic opportunities and political freedom in foreign countries—a very obvious stye in China's national identity projection. Irrespective of the amount of violence power at its command, such a repressive state is *ipso facto* a weak state. No state, certainly not a huge multinational state, can be held together for too long without a legitimizing democratic system, as dramatically shown by the collapse of what was widely and wrongly perceived to be a strong state in the former Soviet Union.

Can a weak, insecure, and fragmenting state be expected to be or act as a responsible and peace-loving great power? Only time will tell whether my reading of China's security behavior as more domestically driven and as more conflict prone is correct. As it is, the once widely shared image of a China in disintegration and of a dragon rampant in

neighboring Asian states seems to be moving perilously close to the reality.

## ENDNOTES

1. In his political report to the 14th CCP Party Congress, Jiang Zemin offers such an upbeat assessment of the external security environment as having "never been more satisfactory since the founding of the Republic," coupled with a rationale for strengthening the military. See the full text of the report in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service: Daily Report: China* [hereafter cited as *FBIS-China*], October 21, 1992, pp. 1-21, especially at pp. 15-16 [hereafter cited as Jiang's Political Report]. See also Chen Qimao, "New Approaches in China's Foreign Policy: The Post-Cold War Era," *Asian Survey* 33:3, March 1993: 237-251, especially at p. 239.

2. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *SIPRI Yearbook 1993: World Armaments and Disarmament*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 10.

3. *The Economist*, January 27-February 2, 1996: 102.

4. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol. I, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965, p. 13.

5. Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 250.

6. "On the Ten Major Relationships, April 25, 1956," in *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung*, Vol. 5, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1977, p. 288.

7. This reflects the general characteristic and trend of post-Mao Chinese international relations scholarship. Despite the plethora of publications on international relations and the Marxist proclivity to theorize on almost every subject, IR scholarship in post-Mao China is marked by the poverty of theorizing and the paucity of scholarly writings on China's own international relations. For further elaboration of this point, see Samuel S. Kim, *China In and Out of the Changing World Order*, Princeton, NJ: Center of International Studies, 1991, pp. 5-12.

8. Yimin Song, *On China's Concept of Security*, UNIDIR, Geneva, 1986; U.N. Publication Sales No. GV.E.86.0.1.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

12. See Kim, *China In and Out of the Changing World Order*, pp. 66-74.

13. *Renmin ribao*, editorial, November 25, 1957, p. 1.

14. For discussions on the concept of comprehensive national strength that preceded the 14th Party Congress, see *Renmin ribao*, February 26, 1990, p. 2, based on an interview with Huang Shoufeng, China's leading military expert on the subject; and Li Tianran, "Guanyu zonghe guoli wenti," ["On the Question of Comprehensive National Strength,"] *Guoji wenti yanjiu* [Journal of International Studies] No. 2, April 1990: 52-58.

15. *Renmin ribao*, June 6, 1991, p. 2.

16. Ma Fajing and Dan Yuntian, "Discussion of PLA Weapons Development Problems," *Xiandai bingqi* [Modern Ordnance], No. 6, June 1993, in JPRS-CAR-93-075, October 12, 1993: 34.

17. Xin Peihe, "Foundation Stone for 'New World Order': Brief Analysis on Baker's 'Europe-Atlantic Integration,'" *Shijie zhishi* [World Knowledge] 16, August 16, 1991, in *FBIS-China*, September 5, 1991, p. 7.

18. Quoted in *The New York Times*, November 11, 1990, pp. 1, 11.

19. Yan Xuetong and Li Zhongcheng, "Zhanwang xia shiji chu guoji zhengzhi," ["Prospects for International Politics at the Beginning of Next Century,"] *Xiandai guoji guanxi* No. 6, 1995: 7.

20. See Gu Yan, "Duli zizhu shi Mao Zedong waijiao sixiang de linghun," ["Maintaining Independence is the Spirit of Mao Zedong's Foreign Policy Thinking,"] *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* [World Economics and Politics], No. 2, 1994: 30-33; and Zhao Huaiyu and Lu Yang, "Quanli zhengzhi yu xianghu yicun," ["Power Politics and Interdependence,"] *Shijie jingji yu zhangzhi*, No. 7, 1993: 36-41.

21. See Jiang's Political Report, pp. 15-16.

22. Wang Jisi, "Pragmatic Nationalism: China Seeks a New Role in World Affairs," *The Oxford International Review*, Winter 1994: 29.

23. Cited in You Ji, "The PLA's Military Modernization in the 1990s," in Stuart Harris and Gary Klintworth, eds., *China as a Great Power: Myths, Realities and Challenges in the Asia-Pacific Region*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, p. 249.

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*Power: Myths, Realities and Challenges in the Asia-Pacific Region*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, p. 249.

24. Alastair Iain Johnston, "China's New 'Old Thinking': The Concept of Limited Deterrence," *International Security* 20:3, Winter 1995/96: 5.
25. Johnston, "Realisms and Chinese Security Policy . . .," p. 35.
26. See "Qian Qichen on the World Situation," *Beijing Review* 33:3, January 15-21, 1990: 16; and Song Yimin, "Sifang dui nengzhan hou shijie de zai renshi he dangqian guoji xingshi de jige xin tedian," ["The West's Second Thoughts on the Post-Cold War World and Some New Characteristics of the Current International Situation,"] *Guoji wenti yanjiu* No. 3, July 1993: 1-8.
27. See Peter Wallensteen and Karin Axell, "Armed Conflict At the End of the Cold War, 1989-92," *Journal of Peace Research* 30, August 1993: 331-46; see also *Renmin ribao*, December 23, 1994, p. 6.
28. Yan Xuetong, "Lengzhan hou Zhongguo de duiwai anquan zhanlüe," ["China's Post-Cold War External Security Strategy,"] *Xiandai guoji guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations], No. 8, 1995: 24. The Chinese term, "minzu" that gained currency in the 1980s and 1990s is an elusive term to translate into English, as it can mean "nation," "race," or "people." "Jiduan minzushuyi" which I translate here as "hyper-nationalism" literally means "extreme ethnonationalism."
29. Quoted in Lincoln Kaye, "China: Role Reversal," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 27, 1993: 11.
30. See Patrick E. Tyler, "China's Military Regards U.S. As Main Enemy in the Future," *The New York Times*, November 16, 1993, p. A5.
31. *Cheng Ming*, Hong Kong, November 1, 1993, in *FBIS-China*, November 5, 1993, pp. 1-2.
32. Zong Lanhai, "Zong gong yiding guoji tou hao diren," ["The Chinese Communists Determine Their Main International Adversary"] *Cheng Ming*, Hong Kong, No. 195, January 1994: 16-18.
33. *Renmin ribao*, 4 June 1994, p. 6.
34. Johnston, "China's New 'Old Thinking'."
35. Peng Guangqian et al., *Deng Xiaoping zhanlue sixiang lun* [On Deng Xiaoping's Strategic Thought], Beijing: Military Science Press, 1994, p. 112.

“China’s Push Through the South China Sea: The Interaction of Bureaucratic and National Interests,” *China Quarterly*, No. 132, December 1992: 999-1028.

37. Xinhua, February 25, 1992, in *FBIS-China*, February 28, 1992, p. 2; emphasis added.

38. Jiang’s Political Report, pp. 15-16.

39. *New York Times*, January 2, 1995, p. 2.

40. A crisis active state or a crisis actor is defined as “a state whose decision-makers perceive a threat to one or more basic values, finite time for response and a high probability of involvement in military hostilities.” See Michael Brecher, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Sheila Moser, *Crises in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 2, *Handbook of Foreign Policy Crises*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988, pp. 2, 51, 160-164.

41. See *Renmin ribao*, March 24, 1992, p. 4.

42. For Chinese Ambassador Guang Dengming’s statement to this effect, see *The Manila Chronicle*, September 29, 1995, p. 9.

43. *Jiefangjun bao* [Liberation Army Daily], August 22, 1995, in *FBIS-China*, August 22, 1995.

44. Yan, “Lengzhan hou Zhongguo de duiwai anquan zhanlüe,” p. 27.

45. See *FBIS-China*, January 30, 1995, pp. 1-2.

46. “An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-Keeping,” U.N. Docs. A/47/277 and S/24111, June 17, 1992, p. 5.

47. Paul Lewis, “U.N. Set To Debate Peacemaking Role,” *New York Times*, September 6, 1992, p. 7.

48. This point is made in Foreign Minister Qian Qichen’s major speech at the 46th Session of the General Assembly, which comes close to being China’s annual state of the world report. For an English text of the speech, see *FBIS-China*, October 1, 1992, pp. 4-8; quote at p.7.

49. U.N. Doc. A/47/PV.87, October 28, 1992.

50. Hu Yumin, “UN’s Role in a New World Order,” *Beijing Review* 34:23, June 10-16, 1991, pp. 12-14.

51. I owe this point to Dinah Lee Kung who conducted extensive field interviews with a cross-national sample of the Security Council

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representatives in January 1996 for the Council on Foreign Relations' "Constructive Engagement with China" project. For a more detailed analysis of China's behavior in the Security Council, see Samuel S. Kim, "China and the United Nations," which is a part of the project and will be published in late 1996 or early 1997.

52. For a more detailed analysis, see Nigel Thalakada, "The Antinomies of Chinese Foreign Policy: China's Voting Pattern in the UN Security Council, 1990-1994," Unpublished paper, New Haven: Yale University, May 1995.

53. See *Hsin Pao*, Hong Kong, April 8, 1994, p. 24, in *FBIS-China*, April 12, 1994, 13-15; and *Hsin Pao*, June 24, 1994, p. 25, in *FBIS-China*, June 24, 1994, pp. 7-8; quotes respectively at p. 14 and p. 7.

54. Yu Huizhe, "Zouxiang 21 shiji de Lianheguo-Lienheguo jizhi he gaige wenti yantao hui" ["Toward Twenty-First Century United Nations-Symposium on the Problems of UN Mechanisms and Reforms,"], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, No. 2, 1994, pp. 55-59, especially at p. 59.

55. Latvian Foreign Minister Janis Jurkans specifically mentioned this point during his visit to Taipei in December 1991. See James L. Tyson, "Taiwan, Besting China, Sets Up Ties to Baltics," *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 27, 1991, p. 8; *Free China Journal*, Taipei, January 31, 1992: 1.

56. Cited in Barbara Crossette, "U.N. Mission to Haiti is Reprieved," *The New York Times*, March 1, 1996, p. A8.

57. For detailed analyses and explanations of China's ACD behavior, see Banning N. Garrett and Bonnie S. Glaser, "Chinese Perspectives on Nuclear Arms Control," *International Security* 20:3, Winter 1995/96: 43-78; Alastair Iain Johnston, "Learning versus Adaptation: Explaining Change in Chinese Arms Control Policy," *The China Journal*, January 1996, forthcoming; and Michael Swaine, "China and Arms Control," Paper prepared for the Council on Foreign Relations "Constructive Engagement with China" Project, April 9, 1996.

58. See *SIPRI Yearbook 1992: World Armaments and Disarmament*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 600-615.

59. For China's evolving stand on ACD issues in recent years, see the following: U.N. Docs. A/CN.10/95, May 8, 1987; A/CN.10/116, May 9, 1989; A/CN.10/118, May 12, 1989; A/CN.10/146, April 25, 1991; A/CN.10/150, April 26, 1991; A/CN.10/152, April 29, 1991; "Working Paper: China's Basic Position on the Process of Nuclear Disarmament in the Framework of International Peace and Security, with the Objective of

the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons" (hereafter cited as Working Paper), U.N. Doc. A/CN.10/166, April 24, 1992; and Li Weiguo, "Tiaozheng zhong de hei zhanlue yu hei caijun zhong de xin wenti" ["New Issues in the Readjustment of Nuclear Strategies and Nuclear Disarmament"], *Guoji wenti yanjiu*, No. 3, July 1992: 42-47.

60. See "Working Paper," p. 4.

61. "Working Paper," p. 3; emphasis added.

62. Reuters on line, March 28, 1996.

63. Patrick E. Tyler, "Chinese Seek Atom Options to Fend Off Asteroids," *The New York Times*, April 27, 1996, p. 4.

64. John Calabrese, "Peaceful or Dangerous Collaborators? China's Relations with the Gulf Countries," *Pacific Affairs* 65:4, Winter 1992-93: 471-85; John W. Lewis, Hua Di, and Xue Litai, "Beijing's Defense Establishment: Solving the Arms-Export Enigma," *International Security* 15:4, Spring 1991: 87-109; Shirley Kan, "China's Arms Sales: Overview and Outlook for the 1990s," in Joint Economic Committee, *China's Economic Dilemmas in the 1990s*, Vol. 2, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991, pp. 696-711; and Lincoln Kaye, "Back in the Game," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 11, 1992: 9.

65. Richard A. Bitzinger, "Arms To Go: Chinese Arms Sales to the Third World," *International Security* 17:2, Fall 1992: 84-111.

66. For full discussion on the more synergistic and multi-level notion of "common security," see Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, *Common Security: A Blueprint for Survival*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982; Burns H. Weston, ed., *Alternative Security*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990; and Michael T. Klare and Daniel C. Thomas, eds., *World Security: Trends and Challenges at Century's End*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

67. For further elaboration on the "weak state" theory, see Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, pp. 96-107.

68. See World Bank, *World Development Report 1991: The Challenge of Development*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, Figure 1.1, p. 12.

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